

Message Text

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65-60

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07

SSO-00 /062 W

----- 125076

P R 042055Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7899

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 3070

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT CO

SUBJ: SECRETARY'S LUNCHEON WITH FONMIN LIEVANO-CONSIDERATIONS ON
COLOMBIA'S DOMESTIC SITUATION

REF: BOGOTA 3069

1. THERE FOLLOW SOME CONSIDERATONS ON COLUMBIA'S DOMESTIC
SITUATION WHICH THE SECRETARY MAY FIND USEFUL FOR HIS MTG
WITH FONMIN LIEVANO.

2. COLOMBIA'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND CONTENT BEAR MUCH
RESEMBLANCE TO THOSE OF THE US NO ONLY SURFACE SIMILARITY
IN CONFIGURATION: TWO-PARTY SYSTEM, RELATIVELY INDEPENDENT
EXECUTIVE, LEGISTRATIVE AND JUDICIAL BRANCHES, REASONABLY
APOLITICAL MILITARY, BUT MORE IMPORTANT BUY A DISTICTLY PRAGMATIC,
RATHER THAN IDEOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHY OF GOVERNMENT, AND PER-
CEPTION OF NATIONAL PROBLEMS AND THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL
INTEREST.

3. COLOMBIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS ARE VITAL AND RESILIENT,
AND ARE OPERATED EFFECTIVELY BY A VARIEGATED, BROADLY
BASED ELITE WITH SOME ACCESS FROM BELOW. THE ELITE
CONTROLS BOTH TRADITIONAL PARTIES, LIBERALS AND CONSERVA-
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TIVES, NEITHER OF WHICH IS STRONGLY IDEOLOGICAL. THERE IS NO

STRONG EXTRAD LEFTIST OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT LOPEZ'S LIBERAL PARTY WON AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE 1974 ELECTIONS, THE COLOMBIAN CONSTITUTION REQUIRES THAT "PARITY", EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF BOTH PARTIES IN APPOINTIVE POSITIONS AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS, CONTINUE THROUGH 1978. CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT FOR LOPEZ'S POLICIES IN THE CONGRESS AND WITHIN THE EVENLY CONSTITUTED LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE CABINET HAS BEEN STEADY.

4. COLOMBIAN PRAGMATISM IS TEMPERED BY A TENDENCY AMONG MANY POLITICAL LEADERS TO FIT OR SOMETIMES TO FORCE EVENTS INTO A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK WHICH WHILE OFTEN USEFUL SOMETIMES CHANGES, DISTORTS OR MAGNIFIES THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF EVENTS. PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND FOREIGN MINISTER LIEVANO, BOTH OF WHOM CONSIDER THEMSELVES POLITICAL INTELLECTUALS, ALSO SHARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PRAGMATISM AS WELL AS THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EVENTS TO CONFORM TO A MORE OR LESS MEANINGFUL PATTERN. BOTH MEN ARE ALSO HYPERSENSITIVE REGARDING REAL OR FANCIED SLIGHTS. THEY TEND TO HOLD AUTHORITY AND DECISION TO THEMSELVES, RATHER THAN DELEGATING, PROBABLY DUE TO A MIXTURE OF INTELLECTUAL SELF-ESTEEM ALTERNATING WITH LACK OF SELF CONFIDENCE, AND LITTLE ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE.

5. LOPEZ'S ELECTION CREATED THE EXPECTATION AMONG COLOMBIANS THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD IMPROVE THE LOT OF THE LOWER ECONOMIC HALF OF THE POPULATION. INCOME DISTRIBUTION IS AMONG THE MOST UNEQUAL IN LATIN AMERICA ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT TAX REFORM, TAXATION STILL TENDS TO FAVOR THE WEALTHY. EIGHT MONTHS AFTER HIS INAUGURATION LOPEZ HAD DONE LITTLE TO FULFILL THE EXPECTATION. ON THE CONTRARY. POOR COLOMBIANS, THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION, ARE PROBABLY WORSE OFF THAN BEFORE.

6. THE COLOMBIAN ECONOMY DURING RECENT YEARS HAS PERFORMED WELL WITH GNP GROWTH RATES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF 7 PERCENT. HOWEVER, DUE TO THE WORLD RECESSION AND INTERNAL FACTORS, THE GROWTH RATE HAS SLOWED. IN ADDITION, LOPEZ INHERITED SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF INFLATION--26 PERCENT IN 1974--AND UNEMPLOYMENT WHICH HAVE CREATED SOFT SPOTS IN THE BODY POLITIC. WHILE INFLATION MAY DECLINE SOMEWHAT DURING 1975, UNEMPLOYMENT CONTINUES TO GROW.

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7. ALTHOUGH HARD TO MEASURE, THERE SEEMS TO BE A RISE IN THE LEVEL OF SOCIAL DISCONTENT DUE TO A WORSENING OF THE PERENNIALY POOR CONDITION OF MOST COLOMBIANS AND FRUSTRATION OVER THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF EXPECTATIONS CREATED BY LOPEZ. THE TEMPO OF ACTIVITY OF SMALL MOSCOW AND CHINESE-ORIENTED RURAL GUERRILLA GROUPS, AFTER SOMETHING OF A HIATUS, HAS RESUMED RECENTLY. THE INCIDENCE OF DEMONSTRATIONS, SOMETIMES VIOLENT, AMONG THE URBAN POOR OVER LOCAL CONDITIONS, A COMMON OCCURRENCE

IN COLOMBIA, ALSO SEEMS TO BE ON THE INCREASE AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT EXTREMIST AGITATORS ARE INVOLVED, EITHER EXPLOITING DISCONTENT TO PROVOKE OUTBREAKS OR JOINING IN, ONCE VIOLENCE HAS COMMENCED.

8. LOPEZ NOW FACES A MAJOR DECISION WHICH HAS IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL ORDER AND FOR THE ECONOMY. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SELLING GASOLINE TO CONSUMERS FOR ABOUT ONE-FIFTH THE WORLD MARKET PRICE. (WHILE PREVIOUSLY SELF SUFFICIENT IN PETROLEUM, COLOMBIA NOW IMPORTS A PORTION OF ITS CONSUMPTION.) THIS IS CAUSING GROWING PROBLEMS REGARDING FISCAL AND TRADE DEFICITS. WE EXPECT THAT HE WILL EVENTUALLY BE FORCED TO ANNOUNCE A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN DOMESTIC PRICES, WHICH WILL SHARPEN DISCONTENT AND PROBABLY PROVOKE SIGNIFICANT VIOLENCE. LOPEZ COULD FOLLOW THE PRACTICES OF PREDECESSOR REGIMES AND PROCLAIM A STATE OF SIEGE, PROVIDING INTER ALIA FOR PREVENTIVE ARREST AND CONTROL OVER THE MEDIA, IN ORDER TO LIMIT THE ACTIVITIES OF AGITATORS AND PRESERVE ORDER. HE WILL BE RELUCTANT TO DO THIS, HOWEVER, SINCE HE IS PROUD OF HIS "EXPERIMENT WITH LIBERTY" AND HAS OFTEN INDICATED THAT HIS "CENTER LEFT" ADMINISTRATION WOULD PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.

9. IN SUM, COLOMBIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS ARE SOUND AND THE OUTLOOK FOR STABILITY CONTINUES TO BE REASONABLE GOOD. THE FAILURE, TO DATE, OF THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION TO PROVIDE DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP AND TO GIVE SUBSTANCE TO HIS CAMPAIGN PLEDGES TO ADDRESS VIGOROUSLY COLOMBIA'S SOCIAL/ ECONOMIC INEQUITIES COULD, HOWEVER, LEAD TO A LESS STABLE SITUATION IN THE COMING YEAR.

10. SIGNIFICANCE FOR US INTERESTS. UNDER LOPEZ COLOMBIA IS BEGINNING TO MOVE AWAY FROM ITS CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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THE US (SEE REFTEL). BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF THE TWO REMAINING FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACIES IN SOUTH AMERICA, COLOMBIA'S CONTINUING FRIENDSHIP AND INTERNAL STABILITY ARE IN THE US INTEREST. THE US CAN ASSIST LOPEZ WITH HIS INTERNAL PROBLEMS, WHICH ARE LARGELY ECONOMIC, BY ADOPTING FORTHCOMING POSITIONS ON SUCH MATTERS AS A NEW INTERNATIONAL COFFEE AGREEMENT, AND TEXTILE NEGOTIATIONS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SITUATION, POLITICAL SUMMARIES, BRIEFING MATERIALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BOGOTA03070
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750118-0179
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750482/aaaacwxt.tel
Line Count: 162
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BOGOTA 3069
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 JUN 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <17 JUN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SECRETARY'S LUNCHEON WITH FONMIN LIEVANO-CONSIDERATIONS ON COLOMBIA'S DOMESTIC SITUATION
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, ECON, CO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006